

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims replaces all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of conditioning a substrate, the method including the steps of:

a) [[S]]subjecting the substrate to RF energy in a constrained environment for a time sufficient to heat at least part of the moisture contained in the substrate to a temperature of or above the boiling point of water at ambient pressure; and

b) [[R]]reducing pressure in the constrained environment in a manner causing the moisture within the substrate to boil or evaporate.

2. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 1 wherein the RF energy is at a frequency between about 10 and 100 MHz.

3. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 2 wherein the RF energy is at a frequency between about 27 and 40 MHz.

4. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 3~~ claim 1 wherein the pressure in the constrained environment is above atmospheric.

5. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 4 wherein the pressure is between approximately 0.5 psi and 40 psi.

6. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 5 wherein the pressure is between approximately 3 psi and 30 psi.

7. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 6 wherein the pressure is between approximately 6 psi and 25 psi.

8. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 3~~ claim 1 wherein the pressure in the constrained environment is at atmospheric pressure.

9. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 8~~ claim 1 wherein the temperature achieved within the substrate is between 100 and 130 C.

10. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 9~~ claim 1 wherein the pressure in the constrained environment is reduced by venting.

11. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 9~~ claim 1 wherein the pressure is reduced by applying or producing a vacuum.

12. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 9~~ claim 1 wherein the pressure is reduced by a combination of venting and applying or producing a vacuum.

13. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 12~~ claim 1 wherein the substrate is a lignocellulosic material.

14. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 13 wherein the substrate is wood.

15. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 13 [[or 14]] wherein the lignocellulosic material has a moisture content of more than 60% based on dry weight of the material.

16. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein the moisture content is greater than 100% based on dry weight of the material.

17. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 15 wherein the moisture content is less than 30% based on dry weight of the material.

18. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 17~~ claim 1 wherein the method further comprises the step of storing the substrate to allow the temperature and moisture in the substrate to equilibrate.

19. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in ~~any one of claims 1 to 18~~ claim 1 wherein the substrate is concurrently or subsequently impregnated with a composition.

20. (Original) A method as claimed in claim 19 wherein the composition is an aqueous solution that contains polar and/or non polar solvents, pesticidal or preservative components, and/or polymeric or pre-polymeric components.

21. (Currently Amended) A method as claimed in claim 19[[or 20]] wherein the composition contains a volatile pesticidal or preservative component, and/or pre-polymeric component.

22. (Currently Amended) A conditioning method comprising at least the steps of:

- a) [[S]]subjecting the substrate to RF energy in a constrained environment at substantially ambient pressure for a time sufficient to heat at least part of the moisture contained in the substrate to a temperature below the boiling point of water at ambient pressure; and
- b) [[R]]reducing pressure in the constrained environment by applying or producing a vacuum in a manner causing the moisture within the substrate to boil or evaporate.

23. (Currently Amended) A conditioning method comprising at least the steps of:

- a) ~~[[S]]~~subjecting the substrate to RF energy in a constrained environment for a time sufficient to heat at least part of the moisture contained in the substrate to a temperature of or above the boiling point of water at ambient pressure;
- b) incorporating into the void surrounding the substrate in the constrained environment, a composition which may impart sterilisation, preservative, or property modifying aspects; and
- c) reducing pressure in the constrained environment to allow the moisture within the substrate to boil and/or evaporate.

24. (Currently Amended) A substrate that has been conditioned according to a method of ~~any one of claims 1 to 23~~ claim 1.

25. (Original) A substrate as claimed in claim 24 wherein the substrate is a lignocellulosic material or wood.

26. (Canceled).

27. (New) A substrate that has been conditioned according to a method of claim 22.

28. (New) A substrate that has been conditioned according to a method of claim 23.

29. (New) A substrate as claimed in claim 27 wherein the substrate is a lignocellulosic material or wood.

30. (New) A substrate as claimed in claim 28 wherein the substrate is a lignocellulosic material or wood.